DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 127 793 FL 007 885

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TITLE Professional or Paraprofessional? CATESOL Occasional Papers, No. 1.
INSTITUTION California Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 5p.; For related documents, see FL 007 882-888

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Colleges; *English (Second Language); Language Instruction; *Language Teachers; Masters Degrees; *Paraprofessional School Personnel; *Professional Recognition; *Salaries; Second Language Learning; Teacher Aides; Teacher Responsibility; Teacher Role; Teaching Assistants

ABSTRACT

The paraprofessional individuals involved in English as a second language (ESL) teaching in community colleges are discussed. The traditional definition of the paraprofessional is a non-certified aide, usually a student with little or no instruction in how to tutor ESL students, who helps with oral reading problems and specific language problems. A new kind of paraprofessional is emerging, however: certified teachers with a Master's Degree in English, Linguisitcs, language studies, or English as a Second Language, who may be responsible for running class sessions. This involves not only correcting homework, but planning class sessions, testing, and grading. Regular paraprofessionals and M.A. paraprofessionals do have one thing in common, however: their rate of pay. The term paraprofessional does not always refer to the education, training or ability of a given assistant, but it can be seen as a category specifying salaries. This paper constitutes a plea for professional benefits and recognition, also in terms of earnings, for those paraprofessionals holding Master's degrees. (CLK)

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PROFESSIONAL OR PARAPROFESSIONAL?

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To arrive at an accurate description of a paraprofessional in communitty college ESL classes is difficult these days. One commonly held view is that a paraprofessional is a non-certified aide, usually a student who may or may not be given a little instruction on how to tutor ESL students. Such an aide is most often paid to help the regular instructor in a class by working with individual students or with small groups. The tasks of these aides or paraprofessionals are usually to supervise oral reading, or to help a student who is having difficulty understanding a point that has been covered in class by the regular instructor. The paraprofessional's pay varies from college to college, but the rate is usually somewhere between $3.00 and $6.00 an hour for time spent in class as well as outside of class for tutoring. If the paraprofessional is a student, the money often comes from Work-Study funds. At some community colleges, the student paraprofessionals are given units of credit, instead of pay, for assisting in a class.

Currently a new kind of paraprofessional has emerged in community college ESL classes. These are certified teachers with M.A. Degrees in English, Linguistics, Language Studies or English as a Second Language. The numbers of these teachers--who are considered paraprofessionals by faculty members, administrators, and sometimes students--are growing. This should be happening to the dismay of all full- or part-time ESL teachers who call themselves "professionals." Dismay, however, is not the prevalent reaction of many faculty members and administrators. Many instructors feel lucky to have an "assistant" with an M.A. Degree, and will actively look for an unemployed teacher to serve as a paraprofessional. Students cannot help but benefit from having a tutor with an advanced degree in ESL or English. The fact that the student benefits at last is perhaps the only good part of this type of arrangement. It is certainly easy enough to find an unemployed teacher these days, who is often happy to be paid <u>anything</u> to do what he or she has been educated and trained for.

What I will call the "M.A. paraprofessional" does not perform the same duties as the regular paraprofessional, nor does he or she have the same responsibilities. (Refer to diagram.) For example, as is often the case, an ESL class may be too large for one teacher to handle, but budgets will not allow for another section, <u>or</u> another teacher. The experiences, abilities and past education of the students might be so varied that it becomes impossible to run the class so that each student learns at his own level and at his own pace. To the instructor of such a class the M.A. paraprofessional seems too good to be true. The class can now be split in half according to the student's test scores, so that there are essentially two sections of a one section ESL course. Not only are these sub-sections more manageable in size, but the students are in a more homogeneous group according to their knowledge of English. The M.A. paraprofessional is now responsible for run-

ning the whole class (around ten to fifteen students, sometimes more, sometimes less), if he or she chooses to accept the offer of the instructor. Assuming the M.A. paraprofessional accepts the responsibility, the duties of this "aide" include not only correcting homework, but planning class sessions, testing, grading, and doing what all other ESL teachers do--"whatever works." All of this at the rate of $3.00 an hour. It must also be added that the M.A. paraprofessional is only paid for time spent within the classroom. Preparation for class, grading homework, making up quizzes and exams are not included as part of the time spent "assisting," since there is usually a maximum number of hours that a paraprofessional can be paid per week. The M.A. paraprofessional is considered the instructor of the class by the students, and rightly so. Naturally, the mere fact that the M.A. paraprofessional is given a class at all is usually enough to keep his or her enthusiasm going for the entire semester, although the glow may flicker occasionally upon receiving a monthly check of $100.00 for hours and hours of work.

But there is still another phenomenon occurring in community college ESL classes in regard to the M.A. paraprofessional. Occasionally a new section of a class may be opened, and the M.A. paraprofessional may actually be given an entire class. But the catch is a big one. This certified instructor is not hired as a part-time instructor, but as an "instructional aide" and is paid the classified salary of $6.00 an hour for class time only (once again preparation time is excluded as part of the hourly pay).

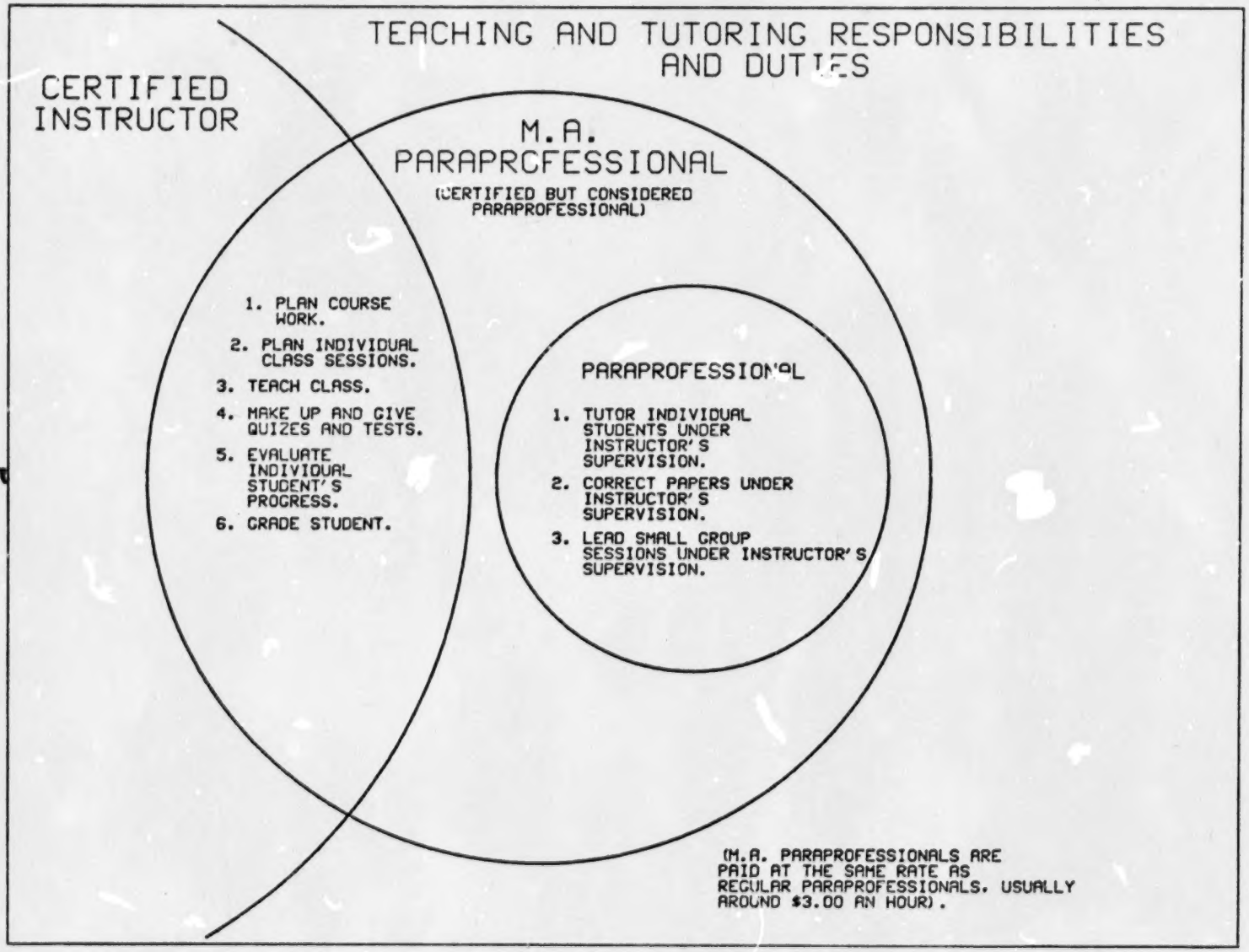
All of this considered, how do we arrive at an accurate description of a paraprofessional? Do we determine it by the extent of the assistant's responsibilities in the classroom? Or by the amount of education or training one has in an area he or she is assisting? Or, do we determine a paraprofessional by the amount of money he or she is paid? It is clear that the M.A. paraprofessional has at least one thing in common with a regular paraprofessional, and that is their rates of pay.

The term "paraprofessional," then, does not always refer to the education, training, or ability of an assistant. It can be seen simply as a category specifying a rate of pay. But as shown above, all paraprofessionals do not perform the same duties, nor do they have the same knowledge of language teaching, ESL methodology, or structure of language. It should be clear that regular paraprofessionals cannot be expected to do the same things as M.A. paraprofessionals. Apparently, however, certified instructors of English and English as a Second Language can be expected to serve as paraprofessionals as well as instructors at the same time.

By considering the "evidence" given, it can be honestly said that there is not just one kind of ESL paraprofessional in the community colleges. Full-time teachers prefer having certified professionals pose as paraprofessionals, but many of them do nothing about having a separate rate of pay for them. This is what I am really proposing in this paper. Being fully aware of the "teaching situation" in California, I know how impossible it is to suggest that full-time teaching positions be given to all those who are qualified. But I do feel very strongly that certified instructors with advanced degrees should be placed in a separate category from student assistants if they are

offered something less than a teaching position, full-time or part-time.

Perhaps the most common and natural response made by tenured faculty members, who, on the surface appear to be sympathetic to the M.A. para-professional's plight, is: "Since you've been educated and trained to teach English, here is your chance to do it. You're lucky. Think of all the qualified people who would love to trade places with you." It's true that I love teaching, and prefer it to any other type of work, but my increased experience is making me as competent and valuable as other faculty members. In spite of this I have received little in the way of professional benefits or recognition for my work. I feel lucky to be able to use my experience, knowledge and energy productively. I know that I am a qualified teacher, and I appreciate the chance to exhibit my effectiveness as such. But I am beginning to feel a frustrating and spirit-draining resentment towards administrators and faculty members who refuse to recognize that I am a professional. Alas, I feel as if I am being had.


TEACHING AND TUTORING RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES
CERTIFIED INSTRUCTOR
M.A. PARAPROFESSIONAL
(CERTIFIED BUT CONSIDERED PARAPROFESSIONAL)
1. PLAN COURSE WORK.
2. PLAN INDIVIDUAL CLASS SESSIONS.
3. TEACH CLASS.
4. MAKE UP AND GIVE QUIZES AND TESTS.
5. EVALUATE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT'S PROGRESS.
6. GRADE STUDENT.
PARAPROFESSIONAL
1. TUTOR INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS UNDER INSTRUCTOR'S SUPERVISION.
2. CORRECT PAPERS UNDER INSTRUCTOR'S SUPERVISION.
3. LEAD SMALL GROUP SESSIONS UNDER INSTRUCTOR'S SUPERVISION.
(M.A. PARAPROFESSIONALS ARE PAID AT THE SAME RATE AS REGULAR PARAPROFESSIONALS. USUALLY AROUND $3.00 AN HOUR).